

How the Fairbury-Cropsey High School got the nickname of Tartars

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When the Prairie-Central School District was formed in 1985, a contest was held to select a new school name and a mascot. The previous mascots and colors were FCHS Fighting Tartars (green and yellow gold), FSW Fighting Eskimos (red and black), and Chatsworth Bluebirds (blue and orange). Prairie Central was selected as the name of the new consolidated school. The chosen new mascot was the Hawks, and the new colors were white, Columbia blue, and navy.

In 1979, Kim Nussbaum was a 7th grader in Fairbury. Kim undertook a project as an assignment in Randy Lane's social science class. Her project was to find out when the Fairbury-Cropsey high school teams acquired the nickname Tartars and who named them.

Kim asked Jim Roberts (1921-2006), the Editor of the Fairbury Blade newspaper, for help on her project. The first phone call that Jim Roberts made was to Don Karnes (1902-1982). Don was a star athlete at Fairbury. He then played football with Red Grange at the University of Illinois and lettered on the basketball team. In reply to Jim Roberts' question, Don replied, "Gee, I don't know; they were the Green & Gold when I played!" Don suggested that Jim call Chuck Purdum (1912-1979). Chuck was not available when Jim Roberts tried to telephone him.

Jim Roberts then called Thomas "Neile" Hanley. Mr. Hanley was senior among our town's half-dozen attorneys in that era and certainly one of the most loyal and ardent fans of the Fairbury-Cropsey teams. "Gosh," Neale said, "it's got to be at least 25 years or more, but I don't know where the name came from." Twenty-five years before this 1979 phone call would have been 1954 for the origin of Tartars as the nickname.

In 1979, Clara Cange (1918-1986) worked as an Assistant Librarian at the Dominy Memorial Library. She started working backward through the Fairbury-Cropsey Criers, the class yearbooks published in that era. Clara reported back to Jim Roberts that she found random but not very dedicated references to the Tartars back in the late 1930s.

The next Saturday, Kim Nussbaum and Jim Roberts visited the Dominy Memorial Library. They found one story—and one story only—in the 1938 Crier that referenced "The Tartars." They also noted that the name of John Ziegenhorn (1923-2013) was mentioned often in the same Crier.

When Jim Roberts telephoned John Ziegenhorn, he got an instant answer to the question about the origin of the name Tartars. John recounted that it started with "Buck" Smith (1910-1976) when he started his second year as the football coach. We'd been the

"Warriors" for a short time, and he didn't like that, so he came up with the name Tartar. "At that time, I didn't even know what a Tartar was," John continued.

Jim Roberts recounted that apparently, neither did anyone else, for the illustration which has been used since that time is not of a Tartar but of a Trojan, a helmeted 'Warrior' from Troy. The Trojans, you will remember if you recall your assignments in Homer's epic poem, the Illiad, were the ill-fated Warriors on the western shore of what is now Turkey, near the Hellespont and the Dardanelles straits, who were victimized and wiped out by the Greeks in the famous "Trojan Horse" escapade about 800 BC.

Some 2,000 years later, the Tartars, who founded the Mongolian Empire in the north of what is now China in about 800 AD, began a westerly movement about 1,200 AD and ultimately ended up all through Central Europe, including Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Turkey, Russia, and Bulgaria.

Today, the term Tartar applies to the Turks, but there is about a 2,000-year difference between the time the Trojans and the Tartars occupied that Turkish turf.

Jim Roberts recounted that "Buck" Smith, who coached at Fairbury, had died in 1976 and was a close friend of Chuck Purdum. If Mr. Roberts had been able to contact Chuck Purdum, he probably knew the story of where the nickname Tartars came from.

Jim Roberts could not determine who picked out a Trojan head and called him a Tartar. This Trojan head was used for many Fairbury-Cropsey-related items, including sports items, band items, three-ring school folder covers, and school handbooks. Many of these items have been donated, and some are on display at the Fairbury Echoes Museum.

The Tartar nickname was used for about 47 years, from 1938 until the Prairie-Central school consolidation in 1985, when the Hawks became the school mascot or nickname.

**FAIRBURY-CROPSEY
HIGH SCHOOL**



**TARTARS
HANDBOOK**

Prepared by
the
F.C.H.S. STUDENT COUNCIL

The Fairbury-Cropsey High School handbook for the 1962-63 school year. The Tartar emblem was used on many different school-related items.